



3 Proven Ways to Build Population Health Models That Last

Population health transformation happens when systems partner with communities and commit for the long term. This guide distills actionable lessons from leaders who've made it work:



Nick Jones, Vice President of Community Wellness, Nationwide Children's Hospital

Leading one of the nation's most comprehensive, community-rooted population health initiatives.



Mark Clement, CEO, TriHealth

A trailblazing health system leader who is redefining hospital-community collaboration by building cross-sector partnerships to address social determinants of health in Cincinnati neighborhoods.



Emily Nelson, Vice President of Healthcare Transformation, and Jill Hanson, Project Specialist of Healthcare Transformation, MetaStar

An independent nonprofit that improves healthcare quality and equity by consulting, auditing, and convening coalitions across health systems and public health.



Their approaches share three essential building blocks for lasting population health impact: start small, truly partner with the community, and layer solutions for long-term change.

1. Start Small and Prove Impact Before You Grow

Big visions are inspiring, but starting too big can stall momentum. Focus first on one neighborhood, one program, or one priority — then scale when results and readiness align.

Nationwide Children's began *Healthy Neighborhoods Healthy Families* with 10 homes in one Columbus census tract, offering rental support, homeownership pathways and repair grants. That early success improved housing stability, built trust and set the stage for later education and workforce initiatives.

TriHealth began by unifying semi-independent hospitals and practices around a shared system culture and approach to care — what they now call the “TriHealth Way.” By aligning culture and care delivery under a single model, TriHealth created a strong foundation that allowed them to expand their population health work with consistency and credibility.

Why it works: Small pilots allow quick learning, visible wins and credibility with both the community and partners.

2. Listen and Truly Partner with the Community

Listening isn't enough — co-create solutions with community members, align with their priorities and share decision-making power.

Nationwide Children's expanded into Columbus' Linden neighborhood not with a pre-set plan, but by aligning with the resident-created *One Linden Plan*. Instead of introducing new priorities, the hospital supported only those the community had already identified — such as safe housing and workforce development — focusing on areas where they could deliver meaningful impact.

MetaStar plays a “quarterback” role for coalitions, keeping partners engaged, organized and action-oriented while ensuring community voices guide the work. They help bring hospitals and public health agencies together around shared goals — providing the structure and facilitation that keep collaborations moving forward.

TriHealth embeds its work within its communities, partnering with schools, faith groups, food banks and nonprofits to address health disparities and build shared ownership. Through its Center for Health Equity, TriHealth collaborates with community organizations to reduce infant mortality, expand access for the uninsured and improve food security and preventive care.

Why it works: Partnering deeply with communities and coalitions builds trust, aligns efforts with real needs and creates shared commitment for long-term success.

3. Layer Solutions for Long-Term Change

Sustainable impact comes from sequencing interventions to build a foundation for each success to pave the way for the next.

For **Nationwide Children's**, housing stability was the foundation. Once families had safe, affordable homes, the hospital added mentorship programs, STEM career pathways and leadership academies to expand opportunities for youth.

TriHealth's coalitions addressed urgent needs like food insecurity and transportation first, then expanded to chronic disease prevention and wellness promotion.

Why it works: Layering builds momentum, partner engagement and measurable progress over time — creating change that is scalable, sustainable and community-owned.

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Not involving the right people in the coalition at the right time will lead to failure.

JILL HANSON, METASTAR

